

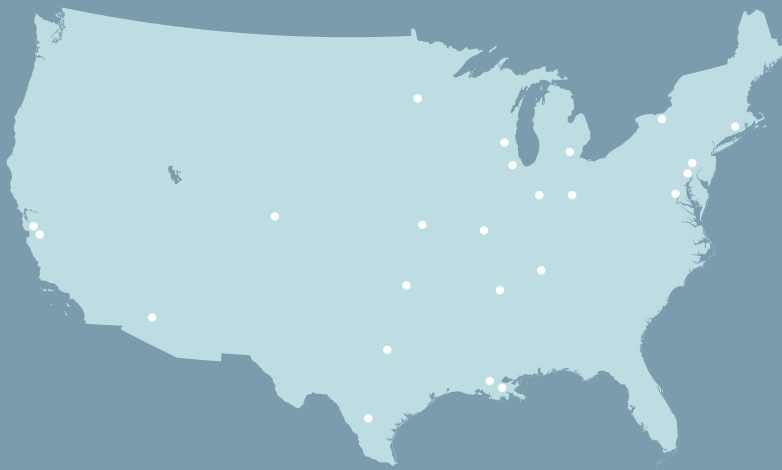
Building Education Cities



Education Cities™

A NETWORK OF LEADERS
FOR GREAT PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

Who We Are



ABOUT US

Education Cities is a network of 28 city-based organizations in 22 cities united by one North Star goal: increasing the number of great public schools.

DECEMBER 2014

OUR MEMBERS

Our members are nonprofits with deep ties to their communities. They invest in high-impact schools and nonprofits, organizations that recruit and champion talented teachers and principals, engage community members as partners for change, and advance pro-children and teacher policies.

Our members serve as education “harbormasters” with deep ties to their communities. Like maritime harbormasters, who facilitate safe and cooperative navigation in a challenging space, education harbormasters build and coordinate the efforts to improve education in their city.

City education systems are like complex harbors; there are many docks and piers and channels with different schools, organizations and education programs. All of this movement, all of these organizations, all of this activity should not be left to chance. Harbors need harbormasters to make sure there are docks, piers and channels in the right places. They use lighthouses, buoys and other tools to help traffic run smoothly. They determine which ships come in and when they arrive. Similarly, education harbormasters assess their city’s landscape, develop and nurture strong partnerships and implement strategies to build and support more great public schools. Together, our members – nonprofits, foundations and civic organizations – are improving opportunities for millions of children and their families.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

We believe that all students can succeed if given access to great public schools. We believe that schools can succeed if educators are empowered to make key decisions in their classrooms and schools. And we believe that school systems can succeed when schools operate with autonomy while being held accountable for strong student results.

Yet, despite decades of reform, documented best practices and the efforts of generations of talented educators, superintendents, and central office staff, school systems continue to resist change and often serve children and families poorly.

School systems were designed for a simpler age, when a high school education could secure a stable future. Today, we ask more of our schools. While times have changed, most school systems have not. When addressing the challenges of education, simply put, it’s not the people, it’s the system.

We want to change these systems to ensure great public schools for all our children. To do so, we build the capacity of our network members to invest in the growth of great schools, recruit and support talented teachers and principals, engage their communities and advance pro-children policies.

OUR APPROACH

CONVENING

We bring our members together to define shared challenges, explore solutions and generate new ideas to improve student outcomes

CONSULTING

We advise our members on their efforts to help more families access great public schools, and we help non-member organizations apply lessons learned from our network.

COMMUNICATING

We write about trends we see across cities, and we promote bold ideas and approaches that lead to better outcomes for children.

OUR TEAM

The Education Cities team includes experts in education policy, teaching and learning, school governance, personalized learning, charter schools, community engagement, advocacy and strategic communications.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank David Harris, Neerav Kingsland, Jon Rybka, Van Schoales, Andy Smarick and Julie Wright for their editorial support of this paper. We are grateful to Mark Gleason, Maura Marino, Maggie Runyan-Shefa, Michael Stone, Mike Wang and Mieka Wick for their assistance with our member profiles. We appreciate the ongoing support of our Board of Directors: Tonya Allen, Matthew Boch, Dr. Howard Fuller, David Harris, Tony Lewis and Earl Martin Phalen. Any errors are our own.

FOREWORD

In June of 2010, The Mind Trust, an Indianapolis-based organization seeking to empower talented people to innovate in public education, built a network of peer organizations in other cities to share ideas, tools and research, as well as collaborate. The goal for the network, called Cities for Education Entrepreneurship Trust (CEE-Trust), was to expand entrepreneurial approaches to education by helping effective programs grow across cities.

We quickly learned that these city-based organizations, which we would eventually call “education harbormasters,” had ambitions beyond the expansion of entrepreneurial programs. They each shared a desire to work in service of their communities and dramatically improve public education in their cities. They were each frustrated that attempts to improve their local school district were rarely successful and never sustainable, and they were all driven to ensure that all children had access to high-quality public schools.

CEE-Trust embraced this broader vision and began to convene its growing membership around topics such as recruiting and retaining great teachers and school leaders, growing high-quality autonomous schools, planning for personalized learning across school systems and redesigning school districts to achieve stronger student results.

The more members connected with each other, the more they sought hands-on support from our team so that national lessons could be applied regionally. Based on that increasing demand, we researched and published relevant topics and developed a consulting practice so we could provide customized support to members and leaders in other cities.

“Today, we relaunch our organization as Education Cities – a network of leaders for great public schools.”

While we have a new name, we will continue our core convening, consulting and writing. We are also committing to a shared North Star to guide both our work and the work of our members: a rapid increase in the number of high-quality public schools in member cities.¹

To achieve this North Star, we are identifying the most impactful strategies in cities across the country and building tools and services to help our members and other city leaders achieve faster progress.

Our hope is that with the clarity of this North Star, the strength of our newly developed tools and services, a growing network of members and partners, and a robust team of experts, Education Cities will spark new and sustainable progress in the effort to ensure all children have access to high-quality public schools.

We wrote this report to serve as an introduction to the harbormaster approach and the work of our organization. In the sections that follow, we share more about our vision and define what it means to be an education city. We explore the key role that aspiring education harbormasters can play to build education cities and illustrate four key strategies behind the harbormaster approach using examples from our members.

We strive to bring humility to these pages by noting both successes and challenges in the harbormaster approach. Our members cannot yet claim to have succeeded at achieving their missions, and neither can we. However, we believe there is promise to the harbormaster model. We believe that these organizations are uniquely positioned to grow the number of high-performing public schools in their cities at a more rapid pace. And we strive to provide support and guidance to these organizations while carefully monitoring their progress and our own so that, collectively, this network better serves students and communities in the years to come.

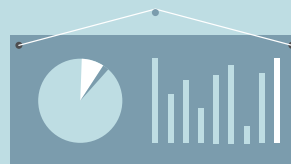
In the meantime, we hope this primer inspires leaders in other cities to consider the harbormaster approach and to join us in committing themselves to achieving the North Star of high-quality public schools for every child.

Yours in service,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ethan Gray', with a large, stylized loop at the end.

Ethan Gray

Founder and CEO, Education Cities



Education Cities

An Education City is our vision of a future where every child can access great public schools. Leading city-based nonprofits - or what we call education "harbormasters" - can help make this vision a reality in their cities by focusing on the following four strategies:

1. QUALITY SCHOOLS

Replicate great existing district and charter schools, launch promising new schools, and improve or replace schools that are not serving students well.

2. EFFECTIVE EDUCATORS

Recruit, support, and retain great teachers and leaders.

3. SUPPORTIVE POLICY

Support policies that help great educators create schools that meet the needs of students and families.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Work with parents and other stakeholders to advocate for great public schools.

QUALITY SCHOOLS
EFFECTIVE EDUCATORS
SUPPORTIVE POLICY
+ COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT
AN EDUCATION CITY

Education Cities is a network of education harbormasters across the country working to increase the number of great public schools. Together, we are improving educational opportunities for millions of families and children.

EDUCATION-CITIES.ORG



Education Cities™

INTRODUCTION

Two years ago, as The Cities for Education Entrepreneurship Trust (CEE-Trust), we released a report, *Kickstarting Reform*, in which we argued that local organizations are uniquely positioned to lead citywide efforts to improve public education. In that report, we used the experiences of three organizations – The Mind Trust, New Schools for New Orleans and The Skillman Foundation – to show how these organizations leveraged their leadership within their respective cities to align funding, push for policy change, attract innovative programs and create an overall ecosystem that supports educational improvement.

Two years later, and four years after CEE-Trust first launched, we have seen an increasing number of organizations embrace their role as education harbormasters in their cities. As a network, we have also increased our collective knowledge about the role that harbormasters can play in creating the conditions for more high-quality public schools to emerge.

As a conclusion to *Kickstarting Reform*, we offered seven lessons for local organizations that wished to catalyze change in their cities. Today, many of the lessons in *Kickstarting Reform* remain at the core of our network. For example, effective harbormasters require strong leaders with deep connections to their local education, policy and civic communities. Strong leaders position harbormasters to set a vision for excellence in their city and partner with others to manifest that vision through new school development and systemic change. Another lesson from *Kickstarting Reform* that remains true is that harbormasters can help local funders increase the impact of their giving; harbormasters give funders a clear picture for how their dollars can leverage resources from other local and national funders while advancing a comprehensive citywide plan to grow great public schools.

While the lessons of *Kickstarting Reform* remain true, the report was focused primarily on describing the *characteristics* of effective harbormasters. Today we focus on the *strategies* effective harbormasters deploy. Specifically, we describe what we see as four key strategies and suggest that through activities aligned to these four strategies harbormasters can help create education cities.



*What is an
Education City?*



CHAPTER ONE

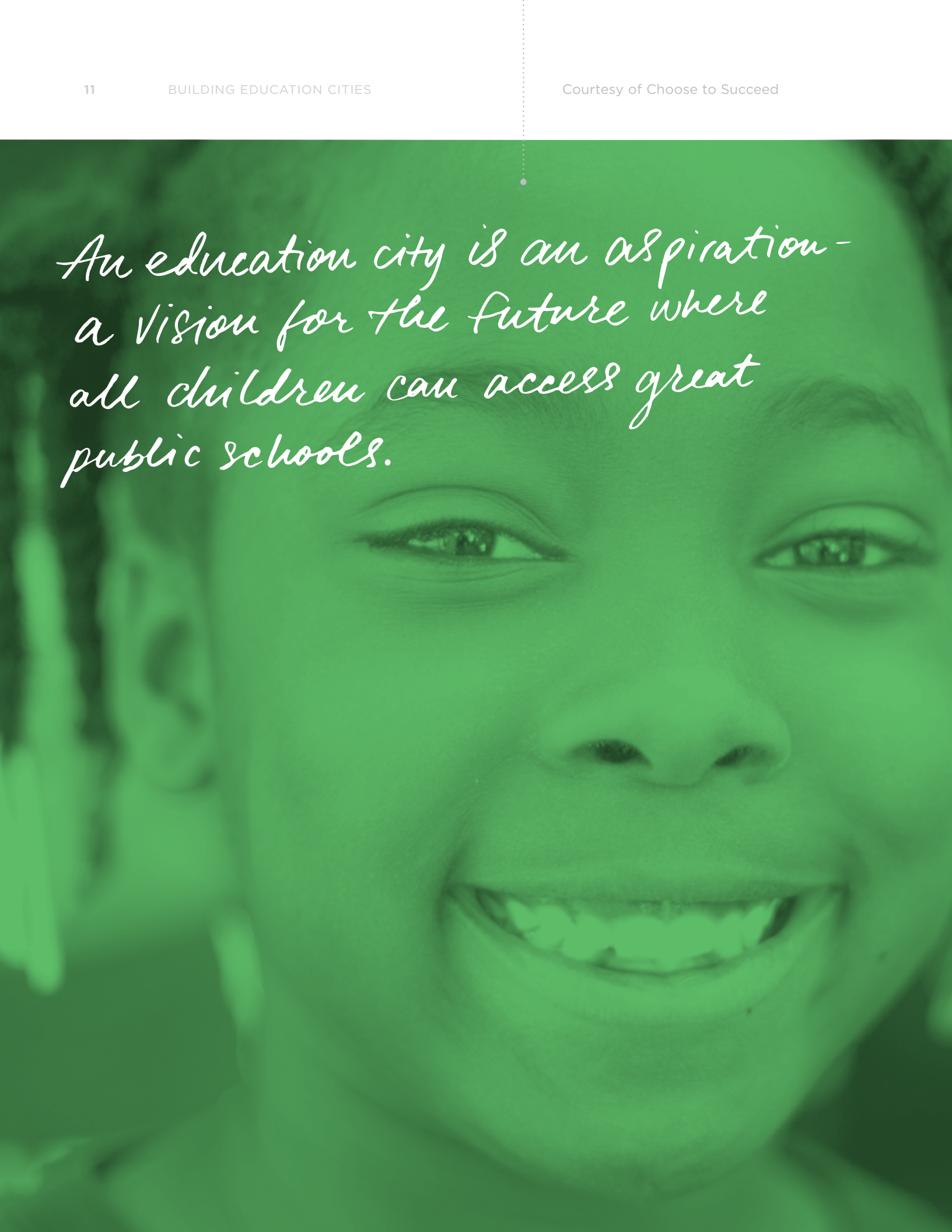
An education city is an aspiration. It is the embodiment of an ideal that one day, all children will have access to high-quality public schools. But our school systems were designed for an era when a high school degree was all you needed to access the middle class. Our expectations for public schools have grown as it has become clear that post-secondary education or training is now a necessity if you want to thrive in the 21st century economy. Yet, despite decades of reform, including the efforts of countless talented teachers, principals, superintendents, parents, philanthropists and other stakeholders, there is no city in America that is coming close to providing a great public school for all of its children.

Simply put, there are no education cities in the United States.


Some cities are making progress, but many more remain mired in mediocrity or abject failure. For example, in Detroit, over 90% of children score below proficient in math and English Language Arts (ELA).² In Kansas City, 70% of children score below proficient in math and ELA. And in Rochester, NY, only 43% of students who entered high school in 2009 graduated.³

We must acknowledge our generation-spanning failure on behalf of our nation's children. We know that better results are possible.

There is reason for modest optimism; a few cities have successfully created more great schools for their children.



*An education city is an aspiration -
a vision for the future where
all children can access great
public schools.*



Over the past eight years, **New Schools for New Orleans (NSNO)** has invested in incubating new schools, replicating successful schools and supporting the overall education ecosystem to create a new system of schools from scratch after Hurricane Katrina. NSNO's strategy is yielding positive results: NSNO-funded schools are performing twice as well as other schools in New Orleans.⁴ Black students in poverty, who comprise 79% of the student population in New Orleans, learn as much in one year in new charter public schools as their peers learn in approximately 1.5 years in a traditional public school.⁵ More than 70% of New Orleans' high school students are now graduating, which is a dramatic increase over the last eight years and now matches the Louisiana average.⁶ Furthermore, proficiency scores are up 20 points in eight years.⁷

The **Philadelphia School Partnership (PSP)** is a little more than halfway toward its goal of expanding high-performing district, charter and Catholic schools to ensure that an additional 35,000 Philadelphia students are prepared for college. Through their investments, which will total \$100 million, and their collaborations, more than 15,000 students have access to new high-quality school options.⁸

In Washington, D.C., **NewSchools Venture Fund's DC Schools Fund (DCSF)** aims to double the number of students in high-quality schools by 2017 and decrease the number of underperforming charter schools. In the 2013-14 school year, DCSF supported the opening of six new schools that are already serving more than 2,400 students. DCSF schools are outperforming the district in both English Language Arts (ELA) and math.⁹

In these cities, individual public schools are showing that, when given access to a great school, children from all backgrounds can succeed. But if cities are ever going to create an education system that serves all children well and not just those lucky enough to attend a high-quality school, school systems are going to need more schools that work and fewer schools that don't.

A young girl with dark, curly hair is shown in profile, looking thoughtfully to the left. Her hand is near her chin. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter. Overlaid on the image is the text "we need more schools that work and fewer that don't." in a white, handwritten script font. A vertical dotted line runs down the page, passing through the text.

*we need more schools
that work and
fewer that don't.*

At Education Cities we have launched a project to both define and measure school quality across the cities in our network and beyond. We seek to be a source of information for teachers, parents and community leaders who seek to better understand the current state of the education system in their city, as well as the progress necessary to ensure every student has access to high-quality schools.

What do we mean by “high-quality schools?” We look not only at the overall performance of schools, but also at the number of students within schools that are receiving a high-quality education. We move beyond the current rudimentary school quality measures many states have in place that often obscure the fact that some schools can be rated “high-performing” even when large numbers of students (typically low-income students and/or students of color) are served poorly. We need a deeper level of analysis, down to the individual student or “seat” level, to shine a light on the true quality of schools and availability of opportunity in a city.

DEFINING HIGH-QUALITY SCHOOLS

In the US, we cannot currently answer the question “How rapidly is city x increasing the number of high-quality schools, especially those serving low-income students, and how does that compare to city y?” Each city and state looks at performance differently, though many cities already have detailed report cards analyzing local school quality. Education Cities, in partnership with our members, is creating a tool (to be released early 2015) to help answer the cross-city question with reports and visuals that are easy to use and understand.

Unfortunately, many states do not currently report data that truly reflects which schools are preparing students for life, college and career. For now, that means we will have to use the available data, namely state test scores, SAT/ACT scores and graduation rates, to create a proxy for college and career readiness.

When we release the tool, we will be able to evaluate harbormaster strategies in the context of outcomes for the first time. We will then analyze those strategies and seek examples of best practice to share with others. We look forward to updating this report once that analysis is complete.

With better, richer information about school quality in cities, our educators, parents, community leaders and Education Cities members will have a better understanding of their current landscape, as well as a greater sense of what it will take to reach our collective North Star goal.



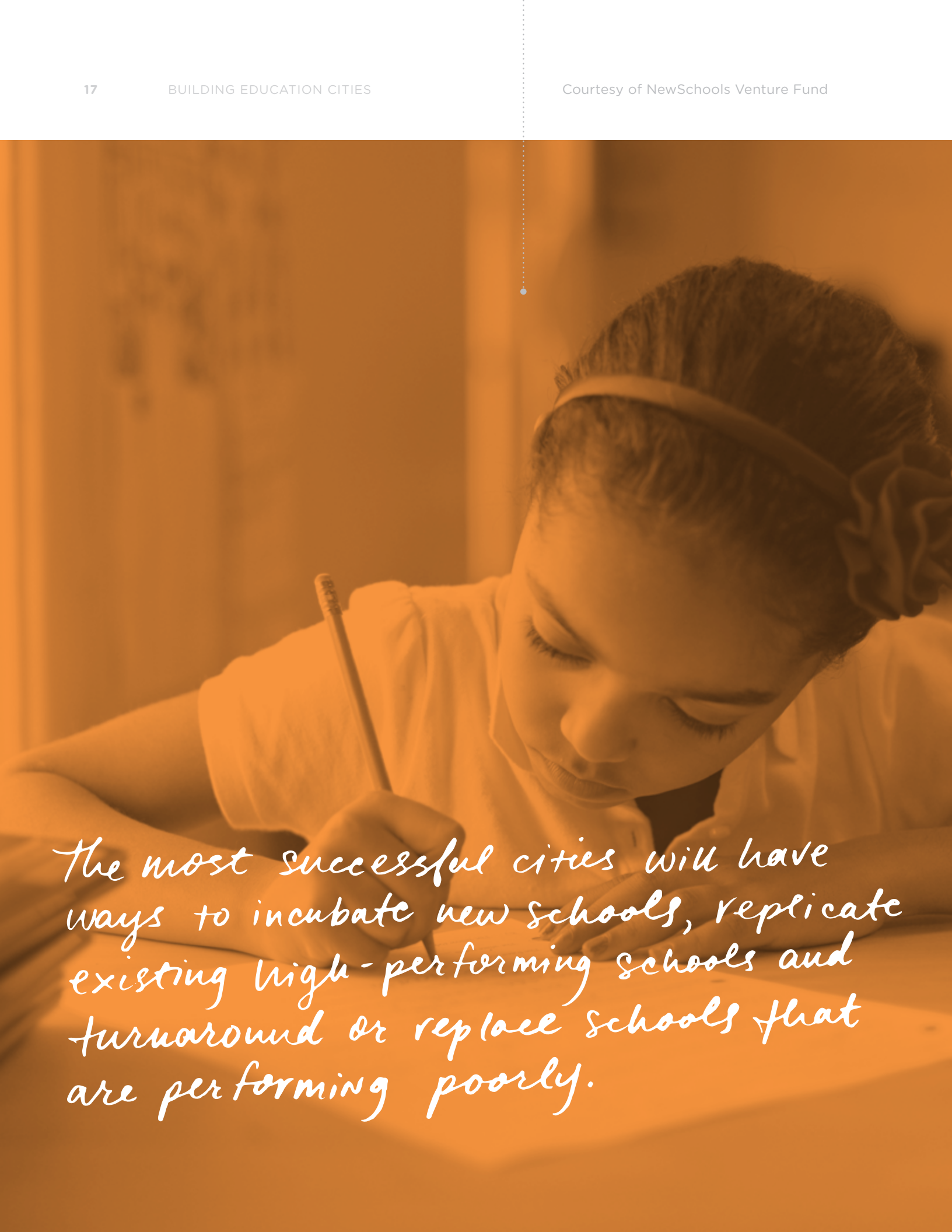
How Harbormasters Build Education Cities

CHAPTER TWO

The increasing number of harbormaster organizations in US cities indicates a growing interest in locally led improvement efforts. In an era defined by the perception of state and federal overreach, these organizations embody the notion that change should be driven locally. Harbormasters are staffed by local leaders with deep ties to their city who work in service of local students and educators. By aligning vision, resources, talent and political will, these organizations become the strategic leaders of their community's efforts to create more great schools. They can also be the recipients of heated opposition from those who seek to preserve the status quo. Both are valuable roles.

We believe that there are four main elements to the harbormaster strategy: supporting quality schools, strengthening effective educator pipelines, advocating for pro-student pro-teacher policy changes, and ensuring authentic community engagement.

In concert, these four strategies create the conditions for high-quality public schools to launch, grow and persist. Harbormasters often lead in one or more of those areas and work in close collaboration with other local stakeholders on the other efforts to accelerate the pace and sustainability of school improvement.



The most successful cities will have ways to incubate new schools, replicate existing high-performing schools and turnaround or replace schools that are performing poorly.

1. Quality Schools

Cities need multiple strategies to increase the number of high-quality schools. The most successful cities will have ways to incubate new schools, replicate existing high-performing schools and turnaround or replace schools that are performing poorly.

EXAMPLE STRATEGIES

- Incubate new schools by paying stipends to and supporting aspiring school leaders during a planning period before they launch their new schools. Examples include: Building Excellent Schools, Charter School Partners, The Mind Trust, New Schools for New Orleans and Teaching Trust.
- Invest in high-quality single-site district or charter schools to help their leaders expand to multiple campuses, add grades and/or grow enrollment in existing grades. Examples include: New Schools for New Orleans, NewSchools Venture Fund's DC Schools Fund and Philadelphia School Partnership.
- Recruit high-performing charter schools to relocate to your city by offering startup capital, access to school facilities and pathways to scale. Examples include: Choose to Succeed, Hyde Family Foundations and Schools That Can Milwaukee.
- Provide traditional district schools with more autonomy to empower great school leaders and teachers. Examples include The Mind Trust and Philadelphia Schools Partnership.
- Support school improvement efforts by funding and partnering with an operator or program that specializes in school turnarounds. Examples include CityBridge Foundation and Philadelphia School Partnership.

2. Effective Educators

Great schools need great leaders and teachers. In order for schools to be successful and grow, cities need sources from which to recruit top-notch educators. Every harbormaster in our network invests in programs to supply the school leader and teacher talent needed to achieve their goals. These investments focus on both traditional and alternative preparation and innovative professional development programs. Some harbormasters also collect data on each of these program's abilities to prepare the most effective educators so that, over time, they can invest more resources in high-quality talent sources.

EXAMPLE STRATEGIES

- Invest in proven teacher and leader pipeline programs like Teach For America, New Leaders and TNTP, as well as traditional teacher preparation programs that train great teachers. Examples include: The Chicago Public Education Fund, Hyde Family Foundations, The Mind Trust and Rogers Family Foundation.
- Create or support local leadership development programs that prepare principals for school leadership. Examples include Charter School Partners and Teaching Trust.
- Support teacher voice organizations like Educators4Excellence, Teach Plus and Teachers United that help retain high-quality early to mid-career teachers by giving them growth opportunities. Examples include: Hyde Family Foundations, The Mind Trust and New Schools for New Orleans.
- Develop the skills and leadership capacity of existing teachers through educator development programs like the Relay Graduate School of Education. Examples include New Schools for New Orleans.

3. Policy Change

In an ideal world, state policy fosters the conditions through which more high-quality schools emerge. With strong education expertise and their finger on the local pulse, harbormasters often educate lawmakers about policies that can enable strong schools. In large states with multiple cities and multiple harbormasters, harbormasters sometimes join coalitions or support external organizations to advance common policy goals. In some instances, harbormasters invest in organizations that engage in electoral politics in an effort to elect pro-change school board members or legislators. Regardless of size or geography, harbormasters can directly or indirectly create stronger policy and political environments for schools, educators and parents in their state.

EXAMPLE STRATEGIES

- Fund and produce research that can be used to educate lawmakers about needed policy changes. Examples include: Donnell-Kay Foundation, Kauffman Foundation, The Mind Trust, New Schools for New Orleans and Thomas B. Fordham Institute.
- Invest in policy, advocacy and electoral organizations like 50CAN, Democrats for Education Reform, Stand for Children or locally led initiatives that can advocate for necessary policy changes. Examples include: Hyde Family Foundations, The Mind Trust, The Minneapolis Foundation and Philadelphia School Partnership.
- Host public events to discuss policy with political leaders, parents, educators and other stakeholders. Examples include: CityBridge Foundation, Kauffman Foundation and The Mind Trust.



4. Community Engagement

In many of the cities we work with we hear a common lament: “It’s easier to catalyze change than to sustain it.” Similarly, many recent reform efforts have been done *to* rather than *with* communities. Effective harbormasters recognize that constant and authentic engagement with families, business owners, civic leaders and others is necessary to ensure that schools reflect the priorities of the community.


We would note, however, that this is the area of work where harbormasters have struggled the most. Often, education leaders are more adept at navigating conversations with grassroots leaders than they are at listening to, learning from and engaging with grassroots constituents. Given the issues of race, class and power embedded in public education, it is critical that harbormasters deepen their commitment to community engagement and elevate the leadership and voices of those not typically heard. There is often conflict in this work. Education is a multi-billion dollar enterprise in this country, and there are many people and interest groups who make money off of the current system. By working with and engaging teachers, parents, families and community groups, harbormasters can ensure that those who are served by the school system are as much a part of the debate as those who profit from maintaining the system as it is today.

EXAMPLE STRATEGIES

- Host or participate in community conversations about education change and improvement. Examples include: Excellent Schools Detroit, Great Oakland Public Schools (GO), The Mind Trust and Skillman Foundation.
- Engage with families directly by sponsoring tours of high-performing schools and supporting parental demand for better educational options. Examples include: Excellent Schools Detroit, GO Public Schools and The Mind Trust.
- Invest in external organizations that specialize in community engagement such as Families for Excellent Schools, Stand for Children or a locally led organization. Examples include: Gates Family Foundation, Hyde Family Foundations, The Mind Trust, Rogers Family Foundation and Skillman Foundation.
- Provide opportunities for local families, educators and other community members to meet with policymakers, funders and other decision makers to ensure all voices are heard.



Harbormaster strategies in Action



How do the four strands of harbormaster activity come together?

On the following pages we share a few portraits of our members to illustrate a comprehensive harbormaster approach.

PORTRAIT: THE MIND TRUST

The Mind Trust in Indianapolis is an example of an organization that has embraced its ecosystem-building role. The Mind Trust launched in 2006 to help talented people innovate in public education. Since then, The Mind Trust has supported the creation or expansion of 19 organizations that work in concert to improve the local school system and increase the number of high-quality schools in the city.

QUALITY SCHOOLS

The Mind Trust has invested in growing high-quality schools through its Charter School Incubator (to launch and replicate best-in-class charter schools) and its Innovation School Fellowship (to support great school leaders who want to develop new schools that operate under autonomy contracts with the local school district). To date, The Mind Trust has invested in four charter school networks—Christel House, KIPP, Phalen Leadership Academies and Tindley Charter Network—through its Charter School Incubator, with plans to continue to grow charter schools. The Mind Trust has an agreement with Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) to convert 15% of IPS's schools into new, innovative schools, its Innovation School Fellowship.

EFFECTIVE EDUCATORS

The Mind Trust recruited Teach For America and TNTP to Indianapolis and has invested almost \$12 million in them to help bring over 600 teachers to Indianapolis, including IPS teachers of the year. The Mind Trust has also invested in the Indianapolis Principal Fellowship, a program TFA launched in partnership with Columbia University to source new school leaders for district and charter schools. Additionally, it operates its Education Entrepreneur Fellowship to provide aspiring entrepreneurs with a pathway to launch new education initiatives. The two-year, \$250,000 fellowship has attracted more than 3,600 applicants from 48 states and 36 countries. Eight of those applicants have been awarded a fellowship.



POLICY CHANGE

The Mind Trust has produced some of the most impactful policy ideas in Indiana over the past five years. Their report—“Creating Opportunity Schools”—has influenced the direction of IPS and its decision to launch its Innovation Schools.¹⁰ Several policy organizations supported by The Mind Trust, such as Teach Plus and Stand for Children, have played key roles in the passage of stronger policies addressing teacher evaluation, charter schools, pre-K and school funding.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Over the past year, The Mind Trust launched a series of community listening sessions in partnership with UNCF to get the perspectives of more families and community members about public education in the city. It is now running bus tours for families and community leaders to visit high-performing schools and organizing events with noted local and national education experts to build the community's understanding of

different pressing issues. It is also planning a new yearlong education program for Indianapolis community leaders, with a special emphasis on leaders of color, to help these stakeholders become more engaged in local education issues.

FITTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

The Mind Trust is investing in schools, recruiting and supporting school-level talent, working to improve state policy, and engaging community members as partners for change. To date, the organization's initiatives have positively impacted the lives of more than 113,000 students. The organization's focus is now on aggressively growing high quality, autonomous schools (both district and charter) and ensuring the conditions exist for those schools to thrive. With investments in the two school incubators—the Charter School Incubator and the Innovation School Fellowship—The Mind Trust has built pathways for the creation of thousands of new high-quality seats in Indianapolis.

PORTRAIT: CITYBRIDGE FOUNDATION

Since 2007, the CityBridge Foundation has focused on improving K-12 education in Washington, D.C. Recently, CityBridge launched *Tools to 100 Schools*, a strategic plan to increase the number of high-quality schools in Washington, D.C. by 10 schools each year for the next decade.

QUALITY SCHOOLS

As part of *Tools*, CityBridge focuses on both “fresh starts” and “restarts.” The foundation simultaneously invests to recruit new, proven schools to D.C. (e.g., Rocketship Education), expand successful D.C. schools (e.g., KIPP: DC) and turnaround chronically underperforming schools with resources and professional development (e.g., Scholar Academies). Finally, CityBridge serves as a funder of and collaborator with NewSchools Venture Fund’s DC Fund, designed to build the capacity and increase the quality of D.C.’s charter sector.

EFFECTIVE EDUCATORS

CityBridge places a premium on talent, with a particular emphasis on alternative teacher preparation programs such as the Urban Teacher Center and the Capital Teaching Residency. CityBridge has also identified Teach For America as one of its “five big bets” because of its track record of both improving outcomes for students and producing talent that enables long-term systemic change in cities.

POLICY CHANGE

As a final step of developing *Tools*, CityBridge identified a range of policy barriers that could limit the pace of progress. Since the launch of the plan, CityBridge has used its platform and influence to spur conversations about those barriers with district leaders and policymakers across the political spectrum. According to Washington Post columnist, Jonetta Rose Barras, *Tools* is something that “district officials and residents should seriously consider.”¹¹



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

CityBridge has held dozens of conversations with business leaders, philanthropists and education leaders about the *Tools* plan. It also hosts events, such as monthly school tours for funders and local leaders, as well as regular book club discussions with diverse groups of education leaders. The foundation has also funded partner organizations such as The Expectations Project and D.C. School Reform Now to engage grassroots stakeholder groups.

FITTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

In a very short time, *Tools* has become a featured topic in the D.C. education conversation. Now that it is moving toward implementation, CityBridge and other stakeholders will be evaluating impact data and driving resources toward the strategies that prove most successful in increasing the number of great public schools in the city.

Ketcham Elementary School,
Courtesy of CityBridge Foundation

PORTRAIT: PHILADELPHIA SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

Founded in 2010, the Philadelphia Schools Partnership (PSP) is an organization dedicated to creating and expanding high-quality schools in Philadelphia. PSP has raised tens of millions of dollars to invest in the startup, expansion and turnaround of district, charter and private schools. In addition, PSP spends a significant amount of its time and resources creating the policy and community conditions for these schools to be successful. PSP's public goal is to create enough high-quality schools so that 35,000 Philadelphia students who are not currently in high-quality schools will be able to attend one, which is a 50% increase from 2010 when PSP started.

QUALITY SCHOOLS

PSP has invested both in public (district and charter) schools and private schools, including Catholic schools with a rich tradition of serving varied segments of the Philadelphia population. PSP provides funding for promising school leaders to plan and start new schools, as well as resources to help grow proven schools. PSP also invests in the turnaround of failing schools by providing resources to strong school leaders. In order to increase the likelihood that PSP-supported schools will be successful, the organization uses a rigorous and transparent diligence process to assess the capacity of the school leader and school model to drive improvements in student outcomes.

EFFECTIVE EDUCATORS

PSP invests over \$2 million annually in leadership preparation and professional development. This strategy is predicated on a belief that more teachers should have access to top-tier local and national programs that provide high-quality professional learning experiences. PSP is supporting the expansion of Mastery Charter Schools' Teacher Effectiveness Institute to make the coaching program available to more of the city's teachers. PSP has partnered with organizations, such as the Achievement Network, to enhance supports, curricula and student assessments as schools shift to Common Core standards. PSP has



also cultivated and developed more homegrown school leader talent through opportunities such as PhillyPLUS, a school-leader preparation program created by PSP with help from day-to-day program manager TNTP.

Courtesy of Philadelphia
School Partnership

PSP is also the project manager for Philadelphia's Great Schools Compact, which was signed in 2011 by the city, state and charter school leaders, as well as the Archdiocese, to create a more cooperative citywide approach to delivering education.


POLICY CHANGE

Over the past several years the School District of Philadelphia has suffered a series of devastating financial challenges driven by a combination of lost federal stimulus money, exponential cost increases and significant legacy costs. At the school level, class sizes are up, extracurricular activities are on the chopping block, and there is significant community unrest about the state of the schools. In part due to these financial challenges, efforts to grow the number of high-quality seats in the city's schools have stalled.

Early on, PSP realized that it would need to engage in efforts to change public policies to create the conditions in Philadelphia that would allow high-quality schools to grow despite these dire conditions. To do this, PSP frequently testifies before policymakers and educates them about the impact of their decisions on local schools and students.

PSP was also instrumental in the launch of PennCAN to develop and advocate for state-level policy improvements.





PSP has remained focused on bringing desperately needed resources and strategic focus to a truly struggling system.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

As with many harbormasters, PSP has struggled to fully engage community members in their efforts to strengthen public education. By advocating for controversial reforms to the teacher contract, PSP has been criticized by some labor and community leaders. Despite this friction, PSP has remained focused on bringing desperately needed resources and strategic focus to a truly struggling system. To date, PSP's most successful engagement activity is GreatPhillySchools, a resource to help families become more informed about school quality and choices. More than 100,000 families have used the site (or its printed version) to review and compare ratings and profiles on all of Philadelphia's primary and secondary schools. PSP is also leading conversations to move their city toward an approach to school enrollment that will be easier for families to navigate.

FITTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

To date, PSP has invested approximately \$35 million dollars to create over 15,000 spots in high-quality schools, with nearly \$12 million going to district schools, \$20 million to charter schools and \$3 million to private schools. The schools that PSP is expanding are outperforming other schools in the district and are closing in on state averages in reading and math. Two years after PSP investment, on average, turnaround schools increase in academic performance by more than 30%.¹²



CONCLUSION

The harbormaster approach does not guarantee success, however, it is a vehicle to coordinate a set of activities that can lead to more great schools in your city.

Neglecting any one of the four core harbormasters strategies carries significant risk. Some harbormasters may make strides investing in school operators and talent pipelines, but neglect community engagement, thus risking the impression of imposing change on communities rather than building locally owned movements. Others may pursue unwise policy initiatives (tangential to their core work) that bring unwanted and unneeded political opposition to their doorstep.

There are also common mistakes that we encounter in our work with harbormasters in our network. The most common mistake is operating without strategic clarity. Too often, organizations fail to develop a comprehensive theory of change and implementation plan. This lack of strategic clarity is frequently tied to low-quality bars for investment and limited organizational accountability. The boards of directors of harbormaster organizations need to buy into the North Star goal of high-quality school growth and hold the leadership and staff of their organizations accountable for achieving year over year growth in the number of high-quality public school seats in their city. In doing so, harbormasters will have to develop and maintain high-quality standards for the schools they invest in and the programs they support.

Despite these risks and common mistakes, the promising early results achieved by organizations like the CityBridge Foundation, DC Schools Fund, The Mind Trust, New Schools for New Orleans and the Philadelphia Schools Partnership are evidence that harbormasters can facilitate well executed, coordinated city-based approaches to education that increase the number of high-quality schools.

While harbormasters and their local partners may implement a variety of strategies to pursue their North Star, the constant is that the various inputs and activities are measured over time by the answer to one singular question: Are there more children in high-quality schools today than there were yesterday?

Our organization, Education Cities, exists to help leaders in cities undertake this work and measure their progress. We will partner with our current members to quicken the pace at which they are increasing the number of high-quality schools by helping them focus their activities on the four core harbormaster strategies. We will support leaders in other cities who want to replicate the harbormaster approach by offering planning and implementation support. We will provide research and information for the broader education sector to better disseminate lessons learned. Together, we hope to bring focus, strategy and resolve to city-based local efforts to improve public education.

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FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Several of our member organizations are “sector agnostic” in that they support high-performing schools in both the public and private sector. However, Education Cities focuses its efforts on strategies to grow great schools in the public sector.
- ² National Center for Education Statistics. (2013). *2013 Trial Urban District Snapshot Report*. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/dst2013/pdf/2014467xr8.pdf>
- ³ Ciavarri, A. (2014, June 23). *Rochester City School District Graduation Rates Drop*. WHEC. Retrieved from <http://www.whec.com/article/stories/s3482973.shtml>
- ⁴ New Schools for New Orleans. (2014). *New Orleans Impact*. Retrieved from <http://www.newschoolsforneworleans.org/impact>
- ⁵ Center for Research on Education Outcomes. (2013, August 8). *Charter School Performance in Louisiana*. Retrieved from http://credo.stanford.edu/documents/la_report_2013_7_26_2013_final.pdf
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- ⁷ Louisiana Department of Education. (2012, May 23). *RSD Outpaces State in Growth for Fifth Consecutive Year*. Retrieved from <http://www.louisianabelieves.com/newsroom/news-releases/2012/05/23/rsd-outpaces-state-in-growth-for-fifth-consecutive-year>
- ⁸ Gleason, M. (2014, August 4). *Where We Go From Here*. Philadelphia School Partnership. Retrieved from <http://www.philaschoolpartnership.org/updates-from-our-team/where-we-go-from-here/>
- ⁹ On average, students in DCSF schools score seven percentage points higher in ELA and 15 percentage points higher in math.
NewSchools Venture Fund. (2013). *NewSchools 2013 Yearbook*. Retrieved from <http://www.newschools.org/yearbook/2013-Results/#home>
- ¹⁰ Disclosure – Education Cities’ CEO contributed to this report as a former employee of The Mind Trust, and The Mind Trust’s CEO is Education Cities’ Board Chair.
- ¹¹ Barras, J. R. (2014, August 28). *Opinions: The Tools to Rescue Under-performing Schools in the District*. The Washington Post. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/jonetta-rose-barras-the-tools-to-rescue-under-performing-schools-in-the-district/2014/08/27/9bb1c9c4-2d34-11e4-9b98-848790384093_story.html
- ¹² Philadelphia School Partnership. (2014). *Performance*. Retrieved from <http://www.philaschoolpartnership.org/what-we-do/investing-in-schools/performance/>



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